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ABSTRACT

This position paper discusses ethical standards in test preparation and administration. Guidelines for creating a situation that will assist students in doing their best on tests are included. These standards were developed in a series of seminars sponsored by the Washington Educational Research Association in 1998-1999. The standards stress that it is appropriate to communicate to students, parents, and the public what the test does and does not do, when and how it will be administered, and how the results may be used appropriately. It is also stressed that it is appropriate to teach to the state's curriculum standards. Other ethical practice are outlined. Before the test it is considered inappropriate to use any published test preparation material that names a specific test and promises to raise scores on that test by targeting knowledge or skills from specific test items. Other unethical practices, including some related to test security, are described. Unethical and inappropriate practices during testing are outlined. Guidelines for test preparation and administration include suggestions about the teacher's role and the principal's role. (Contains 18 references.) (SLD)

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WASHINGTON EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

White Paper

Ethical Standards in Testing: Test Preparation and Administration

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Test Preparation and Administration

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M. A. Power, Editor

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Ethical Standards in Testing: Test Preparation and Administration

Introduction

Tests should give an accurate picture of students' knowledge and skills in the subject area or domain being tested. Accurate achievement data are very important for planning curriculum and instruction and for program evaluation. Test scores that overestimate or underestimate students' actual knowledge and skills cannot serve these important purposes.

The purpose of the Washington State Educational Assessment Program (WSEAP) is to promote learning by assessing essential skills that all students should possess. WSEAP assessments use representative samples of test items from a content area to estimate student achievement. To get valid and reliable results, it is essential that the scores from selected test items accurately reflect the larger domain of knowledge.

Some efforts to help students do well on assessments can cause artificially high test scores. In other situations, when students have not been adequately prepared to take the assessments - or to take them seriously - artificially low test scores can result.

Test preparation activities which promote quality, long-term learning are appropriate, even essential. Good test-taking skills and appropriate content learning can reduce the likelihood that extraneous factors will influence students' test scores.

Unethical and inappropriate activities are those aimed only at increasing short-term learning and test scores. Any effort to influence performance on specific items or item types is inappropriate, without instruction in and attention to the broader area which those items represent. Attempting to target specific items undermines the purpose of the assessment and calls affected student scores into question.

With the active participation of representatives from other educational associations and agencies in the state, the Washington Educational Research Association (WERA) has developed this position paper on ethical standards in test preparation and administration. Guidelines also are included to help in creating a situation that will assist students in doing their best on tests.

The best way to prevent inappropriate testing practice is to help teachers and administrators become aware of what is good practice, and what is not. WERA invites its members and those of other associations and organizations, to help shape and subscribe to these standards. Everyone concerned with the accuracy of data on student achievement needs to help spread the word about what constitutes appropriate and ethical test preparation and administration.

ACTION SEMINAR PARTICIPANTS - ETHICAL TESTING STANDARDS

The following individuals participated in a series of seminars in 1998-99 during which these standards were developed.

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WASHINGTON EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
ETHICAL STANDARDS: TEST PREPARATION AND ADMINISTRATION

IT IS APPROPRIATE AND ETHICAL TO:

1. Communicate to students, parents and the public what the test does and does not do, when and how it will be administered, and how the results may be appropriately used.

2. Teach to the Essential Learning Requirements (WA. state curriculum standards) at each grade level so that students can accurately show what they know and can do.

3. Incorporate all subject area objectives into the local curriculum throughout the year including, but not limited to, tests to be administered.

4. Review skills, strategies, and concepts previously taught.

5. Teach and review test-taking and familiarization skills that include an understanding of test characteristics independent of the subject matter being tested.

6. Use any test preparation documents and materials prepared by the test-maker, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) or the Commission on Student Learning (CSL.)

7. Read and discuss the test administration manual with colleagues.

8. Schedule and provide the appropriate amount of time needed for the assessment.

9. Take appropriate security precautions before, during and after administration of the test.

10. Include all eligible students in the assessment.

11. Actively proctor students during tests, keeping them focused and on task.

12. Seek clarification on issues and questions from the administrative team responsible for ethical and appropriate practices.

13. Avoid any actions that would permit or encourage individuals or groups of students to receive scores that misrepresent their actual level of knowledge and skill.

BEFORE THE TEST - IT IS INAPPROPRIATE AND UNETHICAL TO:

1. Use any published test preparation material that names a specific test and promises to raise scores on that test by targeting skills or knowledge from specific test items. Materials which target the general skills tested may be appropriate if they reflect school or district priorities and best practices.
2. Limit curriculum and instruction only to those skills, strategies, and concepts included on the test
3. Limit review to only those areas on which student performance was low on previous tests.
4. "Cram" test material just before the tests are given.
5. Train students for testing using locally developed versions of national norm-referenced tests.

*6. Reveal all or any part of secure copyrighted tests to students, in any manner, oral or written, prior to test administration.

*7. Copy or otherwise reproduce all or any part of secure or copyrighted tests.

*8. Review or provide test question answers to students.

*9. Possess unauthorized copies of state tests.

DURING THE TEST - IT IS INAPPROPRIATE AND UNETHICAL TO:

1. Read any parts of the test to students except where indicated in the directions.
2. Define or pronounce words used in the test.
3. Make comments of any kind during the test, including remarks about quality or quantity of student work, unless specifically called for in the administration manual.
4. Give "special help" of any kind to students taking the test.
5. Suggest or "coach" students to mark or change their answers in any way.
6. Exclude eligible students from taking the test.

*7. Reproduce test documents for any purpose.

AFTER THE TEST - IT IS INAPPROPRIATE AND UNETHICAL TO:

1. Make inaccurate reports, unsubstantiated claims, inappropriate interpretations, or otherwise false and misleading statements about assessment results.

*2. Erase or change student answers.

* It is illegal under state statute to conduct or assist in carrying out any of the items marked with *. (Penalties may range from fines to dismissal, or even withdrawal of certification. [RCW 28A.230.190. Acts of Unprofessional Conduct, WAC 180-87-050])

Many of the issues regarding ethical assessment practice are in the hands of the classroom teacher, but a significant number of these issues must be addressed through administrative practice.

GUIDELINES FOR TEST PREPARATION AND ADMINISTRATION

The Teacher's Role:

Students will do their best on tests if they find an encouraging and supportive atmosphere, if they know that they are well prepared, and that with hard work they will perform well. To create a situation that will encourage students to do their best, teachers should:

1. Attend workshops on test administration.

2. Develop an assessment calendar and schedule and share it with students and parents.

3. Prepare students well in advance for assessment by teaching test-wiseness skills. Independent of the subject matter being tested, teach and review test familiarity that includes an understanding of how to use the test booklets and answer sheets, item response strategies, time management, listening, and following directions.

4. Develop a list of which and how many students will be tested and when. Determine which students will require special needs accommodations.

5. Develop a list of students who will be exempted from testing and the reason for the exemption. This list must be reviewed and approved by the principal or test administration committee. Parents must be notified and alternative assessments identified.

6. Develop plans for the administration of makeup tests for students absent during the scheduled testing period.

7. Prepare and motivate students just before the test.

8. Prepare to administer the test, with sufficient materials available for all students to be tested.

9. Prepare classrooms for the test. Arrange for comfortable seating where students will not be able to see each other's test materials but will be able to hear test directions. Eliminate posters or other materials that may be distracting or contain information that could be used to help students answer test items.

10. Alert neighboring teachers to the testing schedule and ask their help in achieving optimal testing conditions and in keeping noise levels to a minimum.

11. Arrange for a separate supervised area for those students who finish early and may cause a distraction for other students.

12. Read the test administration manual carefully, in advance. Administer the test according to directions.

13. Meet with proctors and discuss their duties and responsibilities. Carefully and actively proctor the test.

14. Arrange for appropriate breaks and student stress relievers.

15. Follow the rules for test security and return all test materials to the test administrator.

GUIDELINES FOR TEST PREPARATION AND ADMINISTRATION

The Principal's Role

There are a number of things the principal can do to enhance the testing atmosphere in the school:

1. Inform both students and parents about what each test does and does not do, when and how it will be administered, and how the results will be reported and used. Indicate the importance of tests for students, staff, and the school. Stress the importance of school attendance on the scheduled testing dates.

2. Encourage the implementation of appropriate test-wiseness teaching and review. Teaching test familiarity skills should be independent of subject matter being tested. Discourage subject matter drill and practice solely for the test.

3. Let parents know about upcoming tests and what they can do to encourage their children's performance.

4. Work with teachers to develop a building testing schedule. Attempt to maximize the efficiency of the building's physical layout and staff resources.

5. Pay careful attention to school schedules during the testing period. Avoid planning assemblies, fire drills, maintenance, etc., during the testing period.

6. Develop a plan to keep tests and answer sheets secure before and after administration, and ensure that all are returned properly.

7. Arrange, where possible, for teachers to have proctoring help in administering tests. Ensure that tests are carried out according to ethical and legal practice.

8. Provide a handbook or policy statement such as this one to all involved with test administration spelling out proper and improper testing procedures.

9. Create a process to check out any suspicions or allegations of cheating. Document all steps taken.

10. Require detailed written explanations about why a student was not tested or the reason a score was not figured into a school's average.

11. Encourage teachers' participation in workshops and inservice sessions on assessment.

12. Ensure that all students are tested. Review all test accommodations, including exclusion, as a last resort, made for students with special needs. Ensure that accommodations/exclusions are consistent with specific testing program guidelines.

13. Ensure that there are no interruptions in classrooms during the testing period, including custodial tasks, intercom calls, delivery of messages, etc.

14. Work with the test coordinator and classroom teachers to schedule and staff makeup days for students who miss all or parts of the test. This might include bringing in a substitute or finding other ways to creatively use building staff to administer makeups in an appropriate setting.

15 . Share test results with all staff. Staff members need to work together to ensure that the testing process is a smooth one. School improvement is a team effort.

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